

THE CHOICE IS YOURS

CAI
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SEAN: Can I talk to you about last night?

KEVIN: What did I do now? Stay out too late? Drink too much? I suppose Mum and Dad put you up to this—

SEAN: Hang on. Nobody put me up to this. I'm just concerned about one thing—your drinking and driving.

KEVIN: Well, you're off base this time! I only had three beers last night—so there's nothing to be concerned about.

SEAN: Except that you don't have to be really drunk for your driving to be affected—

KEVIN: What do you mean? I'm a great driver. I've never put a scratch on the car.

SEAN: Yeah, I know. But it's like gambling—sooner or later your luck will run out. * Because drinking **any** amount of alcohol can affect a person's driving.**

KEVIN: How do you know? Are you an authority on the subject?

SEAN: Let's just say I learned my lesson the hard way. Remember that accident I had three or four years ago? I didn't tell you the details at the time because I was too embarrassed. But I had gone to a party with Sara that night. I remember I hadn't had my licence for very long and I was feeling pretty cool taking her in Dad's new car. When it was time to go home, I never **considered** taking a taxi or something. I mean, I had only had a few drinks and I was definitely not drunk—and anyway, I was not about to wimp out in front of Sara. Funny, eh? I was trying so hard to impress her and make it an evening she wouldn't forget...

KEVIN: So if you weren't drunk, why did you have an accident?

SEAN: Well, it wasn't until the next day when I was lying there in the hospital with cracked ribs that I realized that I wasn't really all there when I was behind the wheel. For one thing, I had been writing exams all week and I was really tired that night. I hadn't had much to eat either. The little bit I had to drink probably affected me a lot more than usual. And it was raining—the kind of rain that makes the roads greasy. So when that car pulled out in front of me, I couldn't brake in time...I realize now that I wasn't drunk, but I was **impaired**.

KEVIN: How do you know whether you're impaired or not? Like, how do you know whether it's safe to drive?

SEAN: This may sound stupid, but you **can't** know—except maybe when it's too late. But who wants to find out that their eyes can't handle glare by having a head-on collision? There are just too many things to take into account: what you've been drinking, how long you've been drinking, how much you weigh, what you've had to eat, whether you've had any drugs, what the driving conditions are—it's impossible to figure it all out. And if you've been drinking, you're not in the best condition to make smart decisions.



KEVIN: So you decided not to drink at all if you're driving?

SEAN: Right. And so have a lot of people. My friends used to think it was cool to get bombed and drive around like a maniac. Now they realize that it's not worth the risk to drink and drive **at all**. It sure wasn't for me. Sara got a concussion and a bad cut on her face. Dad wouldn't give me the car for months and made me put all the money I was earning into the repairs and extra insurance. And it could have been a lot worse. Sara might have ended up in a wheelchair. Or someone might have been killed.

KEVIN: Then what do you do if you're going to be drinking?

SEAN: I plan ahead—there's usually at least one easy alternative, like sharing a taxi or taking the bus or getting a ride with someone who isn't drinking—even staying overnight if you have to. My friends and I help each other out because we all know it's not smart to drink and drive. The only safe thing to do is not to mix the two.

KEVIN: So you figure I should do the same?

SEAN: It's up to you, Kev. But knowing you, I bet you'll make the right choice.

** The risks are particularly high for 16-to 19-year-olds (who may in fact be drinking underage):*

- in general, they have more impaired driving accidents than any other age group.
- traffic accidents are the leading cause of death in that age group: 50% of these accidents involve a drinking driver.

***Driving requires precise physical skills and even one drink affects you **physically**. It can make you:*

- less coordinated and slower to react, so you can't brake as fast.
- less able to see and hear clearly or to pay attention to several things happening at once—so you may not notice another car or a pedestrian until it's too late.
- less able to judge anything, including how far away another car is or how fast you're going.
- more likely to take risks, like running lights or making illegal turns, because alcohol gives you a false sense of confidence.

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